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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: Guangzhou International Christian Church Faces RAB  
Pressure

REFERENCE: A) 04 Guangzhou 6362 (NOTAL); B) 04 Guangzhou  
5735 (NOTAL); C) 04 Guangzhou 782 (NOTAL)

(U) CLASSIFIED BY ECONOMIC/POLITICAL SECTION CHIEF JAMES  
TURNER FOR REASONS: 1.4 (b) AND (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Guangzhou International Christian Fellowship (GICF) faces renewed pressure to move its location, but the Religious Authorities Bureau (RAB) has told prospective landlords that the fellowship is composed of troublemakers and advised them not to rent to them. The RAB appears concerned that GICF is growing, ironically due in part to RAB raids on unregistered foreigner organized house churches. The landlord problem has been temporarily resolved with the old landlord extending the GICF lease but the issue is expected to come around again in a few months.  
END SUMMARY

#### International Church Faces RAB Pressure

12. (C) A GICF board member recently told Congenoff that the church is facing pressure to move from the Star Hotel, where it has been located for a number of years. The Star Hotel, in a prime location near the East Train Station in Tianhe, has for some time been interested in moving GICF, primarily for economic reasons but also due, at times, to RAB pressure. Star had requested that GICF move in 2003 due to pressure from the RAB which felt the church was growing too quickly and that some attendees were proselytizing outside of church (ref A). Several foreigners attending the church were compelled to leave China after their visas were not renewed or were asked to leave for "religious activities which did not conform to Chinese law" (ref C). After the church took measures to set up small house churches, which are legal if numbers are below 15 adults, and provided fewer ancillary services, such as nursery or children's Sunday school, the RAB renewed its license and the Star Hotel dropped its demand that GICF move.

13. (C) Unlike its dealing with other local churches, the RAB deals with GICF directly, regularly sends people to monitor GICF services, and approves any new location GICF selects. After locating a large new space near the Star Hotel in a partially empty building, Zhongtai Plaza, with an eager-to-rent landlord, GICF was told by the landlord that the RAB referred to GICF as a "trouble maker" and advised him against renting to them. GICF approached Congenoff to ask about the possibility of approaching the

American International School of Guangzhou to see whether GICF could hold services in AISG facilities or whether the Consulate would object to GICF considering space in the office building housing the Consular Section.

¶4. (C) Congenoff discussed both options with GICF but understood that GICF still prefers Zhongtai Plaza, due to cost considerations. According to GICF, the landlord is willing to offer a low rent and will make significant improvements to the space on behalf of the Fellowship with a view to increasing traffic in the building. In the meantime, GICF met with the RAB to discuss its new space request and explained that while the church was not actively working to increase its attendance, several factors were causing an increase. While not directly giving reasons for its concerns, the RAB clearly is not happy that GICF is continuing to grow.

#### Problems of Growth

¶5. (C) GICF explained that its growth is largely due to Guangdong's economic miracle, much of which is based on foreign direct investment (FDI) and export-led manufacturing. With an average GDP growth in Guangdong exceeding 12 percent for more than 25 years, the number of foreigners has increased. A portion of these foreigners happen to be people of faith, some of whom have come to attend GICF services and be involved in GICF community activities. The Guangdong-based GICF is much smaller than similar international religious groups in Beijing and Shanghai which appear to operate more easily. The RAB did not respond to the GICF explanation.

¶6. (C) Ironically, RAB actions are in part responsible for the increase in attendance at the Fellowship. A number of house churches organized by African businessmen living in Guangzhou were raided and shut down by the RAB. Local

neighbors complained about the enthusiastic services of house churches and the RAB raided them, with the inevitable result that most of the Africans, and other foreigners, with few other religious options, have ended up at GICF.

¶7. (C) Following the meeting with the RAB, GICF learned from Star Hotel management that it was willing to extend the lease for three more months, but would still prefer GICF to move so the space could be used for events with a better return. The problem has been temporarily resolved but is expected to resurface in a few months.

#### COMMENT: Problem Only Temporarily Solved

¶8. (C) GICF has not faced similar problems since 2003. While it did not discuss the RAB raids with its RAB counterparts for reasons of sensitivity, GICF's economic-growth argument is compelling. However, Guangdong's proximity, to Hong Kong with Falun Gong activists and other religious groups, caused Governor Huang Huahua in 2004 to rail against "illegal religious activities" by foreigners (ref B). These sentiments translated into tighter control of foreign religious groups in Guangzhou. GICF would like to use a request to the RAB that it be housed in the same building as the U.S. Consulate Consular Section as its "ace in the hole" during future discussions with the RAB as it pushes for its first choice of space. It hopes that the RAB will be sensitive to potential GICF notification to the Consulate of its space problem, though we are less confident of the success of this strategy.

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